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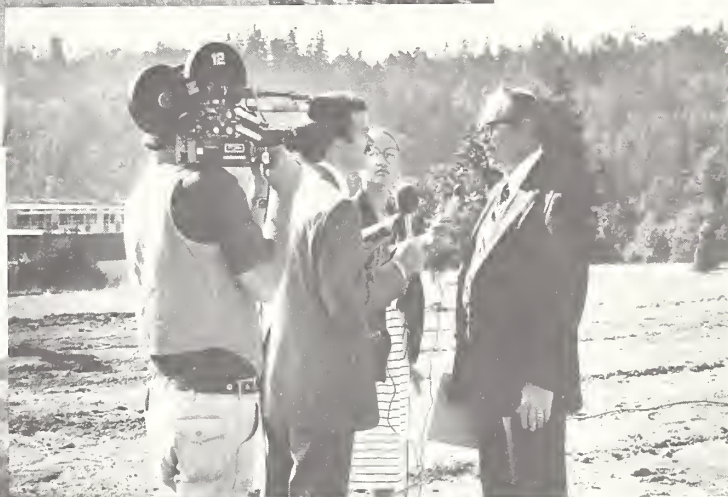
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Tell It Like It Is: You and The Media



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Tell It Like It Is: You and The Media

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 CATALOGING - FREE

I. You, The News Media, and The Public

No getting around it, you may be called on to provide accurate information about your unit to the news media from time to time. In your job, as an official representative of the USDA Forest Service, you will find this duty occasionally "thrust upon you." This can be nerve-wracking—but it can also be an opportunity to develop better understanding of National Forests and the publics they serve.

This could turn out to be a pleasant chore—if you have a comfortable grasp of the needs of the media folks, and of what is expected of you. That's what this booklet is all about.

So What?



Wondering just how it will help you? Here's what's inside. The booklet is divided into several cross-referenced sections on the organization and preparation of information for news organization use. It discusses some specific needs, requirements, and opportunities of the different news media, and provides a few hints for working more effectively with each. Also included is a short list of useful references, and a "resource form" for keeping track of news contacts, deadlines, and "where to turn for help."

As Forest Service employees, we frequently respond to requests for information from the broadcast and print media. We need their help to communicate federal land management policies, plans, and decisions to the publics we serve. The media also needs your help because you may be their only source of this information. Maintaining a good relationship is, therefore, important, as it can have a major influence on how the public perceives the Forest Service as a land management agency. Our credibility can be lost or strengthened by the way we work with TV, radio, and newspaper reporters.

"THE GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF INFORMATION ACTIVITIES (NOT ONLY OF THE INFORMATION OFFICE, BUT OF ALL FOREST OFFICERS) ARE TO OBTAIN PUBLIC AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF FOREST SERVICE PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES AND TO INVOLVE THE PUBLIC IN FOREST SERVICE DECISIONMAKING PROCESSES..."

FSM 1602

"Responding" is not the only style we can choose to fulfill our information responsibilities. We can take an active role in organizing our media connections by preparing our information in a way that meets the needs of our media contacts, and by building working relationships with media people before a need—or a crisis—arises. Good working relationships are easier to maintain if you know your contacts, are aware of (and try to accommodate) their needs, and have your information well organized. This management of information—like any other work project—results in more efficient and productive communication.

Our objective is not to entertain people or to engage in press-agentry. It is to gain public interest, understanding, and support of USDA Forest Service programs and objectives.



Active information management is made easier by understanding "where you stand," as well as by knowing what is wanted of you.

For example, in the Forest Service, most information is available to the public under the Freedom of Information Act—though there may be a copying charge for large quantities of material requested. If you have a question about this, a good resource is your unit's Freedom of Information coordinator.

Accurately understanding your responsibilities—and rights—is another great stress reducer.

For other kinds of help—how to conduct yourself in an interview, how to manage an accurate flow of information, or how to build good working relationships with your own local media contacts—contact your public affairs officer, or the regional Information Office. Both are good resources for specific information. They are usually aware of training opportunities to improve your skills, as well. Your local media people—if you just take some time with them—are also a good source of "how to" information and tips that can make your job easier.



II. What Do Media People Want?

Most media professionals come in search of news... *significant information that affects people*. Generally it has some element of conflict or controversy, prominence, proximity, and timeliness. Sometimes they may be looking for feature stories or "special" article opportunities. These give readers a chance to interpret our activities and programs through comparatively in-depth descriptions. Timing is usually less critical for features (which may be two to four pages long).

For either type of story, we deal with facts, including opinion only when absolutely necessary. *Opinions or interpretation of facts should be clearly identified as such*. In written news releases, these statements should be in quotes and attributed to an authoritative source. To make the facts meaningful, news stories usually contain six elements—who, what, when, where, why, and how. For our purposes, news stories fall into three classes—straight news, hard news, and feature stories.

You'll be handling "straight news" stories most of the time. They are short, factual announcements which report happenings or developments: for example, a campground is planned, enlarged, or completed; an area is given a special designation; vandalism becomes a problem; a person is transferred and a successor named; or a range reseeding project is planned. These stories are often released to the media as single page news releases.

"Hard news" stories have a time element associated with them that is relatively short. Fires, search and rescue operations, airplane crashes, mass protests, or other serious events are examples of hard news stories. The news reports are often given verbally, as there is seldom time to write anything more than a few notes.

Timing is usually less critical for "feature stories." Feature stories may include many of the elements of straight and hard news, but more time and space can be spent developing the story, digging into background information, discussing the future ramifications of an action, and so on. Features might originate from an event that was originally reported as hard news, as in the case of a story about the restoration of an area burned in a forest fire. Features may be directed to a "feature" editor, and may be appropriate for the "Sunday supplement" type of news coverage. While you have more freedom from time and space constraints to develop a feature, you also do not have the news appeal a hard or even a straight news item has. You'll have to work a little harder to convince the editor that the feature is newsworthy.

Occasionally a forest officer's opinion is news—for example, in the case of the future effect of opening or closing an area to certain uses. The journalist will need to quote you or your superior as the source of that opinion.



Fact or opinion, every news story should quote the source. The authority quoted should correspond to the level of decision or announcement being made. If the story provides information on how to do something—perhaps planting trees—let the expert closest to the project do the speaking. If you are the authority, don't let false modesty keep you from giving your name and title when it is needed.

III. Print Media

News Releases

First, some rules for the form and typing of the news release:

Use standard-size paper, 8½" x 11."

Leave wide margins (one inch minimum), and double-space between lines, so editors have space for editing marks.

(You can single-space the last few lines if it will save another sheet of paper.) Indent five spaces at the beginning of each paragraph.

When possible, leave two or three inches of space above the start of the article. Editors need this space to write headlines and instructions.



Put "Immediate Release" in the upper left-hand corner. A release date is seldom necessary (see "Timing the Release"). Page 5

In the upper right-hand corner, print or type the name of your Ranger District or Forest, your mailing address, phone number, the name of a Forest contact (in case the news person needs to call for more information or clarification) and the date. Those Forests using printed news release headings need only the date and perhaps the name of a contact person and phone number. The printed news release heading, however, should conform to the standards identified in *USDA Visual Management Manual, AD701*. A headline is optional. Although some editors like to write their own, a good clear headline can be used to spark their interest in the story—and sometimes they appreciate the idea.

A dateline at the start of the story stating the place and date is optional. This information may already be identified in the printed heading.

If the release runs over one page, put the word "MORE" in parentheses at bottom of page 1 and break the story between paragraphs.

To show the end of your story, use cross-hatches as shown here: ###.

Writing The Release

Jot down your facts on scratch paper, in the order of the "Six Points"—who, what, when, where, why, and how. Now read the notes. Which fact is most important, or catchiest? Use that one to start the story.

When writing about a person, provide the facts that help readers see him or her as a complete person. At a minimum, give their full name, title, and work location. Age may also be needed when reporting a death or a missing person. However, age is a protected item under the Privacy Act and is not available without the permission of the individual or family member.

In any news story, the first paragraph is called the "lead" (pronounced like creed). In a straight news story, the lead paragraph should include most of the six points. It should be short. The "who" identified here is considered the spokesperson

and should be quoted several times throughout the release. *This is known as the attribution.*

After the main points in the lead paragraph, the most important details can go in the second paragraph, the next most important details in the third paragraph, and so on. If the editor must shorten your story, he can then cut from the bottom up, rather than slashing the body of the text.

If writing doesn't come easily for you, perhaps the simplest method of producing a news release would be to organize your facts and write the story as rapidly as possible. Give yourself a break, let your words cool, then edit heavily until you get a concise document. Frankly, it's an art to be both concise and understood. Like anything else, it takes practice.



A few pointers:

- As you know, a newspaper story is generally more interesting when it has an interesting or catchy point. The news story should have a "news angle"—a "hook"—on which to hang the facts. We need to give more than bare facts, however. Use enough detail to be understood.
- Use short sentences and short paragraphs. They are easier for the writer—and the reader, too!
- Make the release short and to the point.
- Don't write more than one page if you can avoid it.

A one-page release has more chance of being used than a longer one.

- Most writers keep a dictionary and a thesaurus handy and aren't too proud to use them.
- Try to put your thoughts into plain English. Avoid the use of qualifiers unless they are absolutely positively necessary.
- Basically, just jump in and try your best. It's helpful to have a competent, understanding person to look at your product and constructively critique it.

Writing A Feature Story

A feature story should have all the six points, but they don't have to be in the lead paragraph. Features are more in the short story class; you can use suspense and other writing techniques.

If you're a bit rusty on writing, brush up with some books (see the reference section, page 00) or consider taking a news-writing course at a local college or junior college.

Feature story ideas are limited only by your imagination. For example, chronicle the arrival or passing of the seasons on your Forest or District, the introduction of wildlife species or tree planting, campground vandalism, on-the-job training, and new personnel. See the news release format information on page 00 for how the finished story should look.

Put "Feature" in the upper left-hand corner. A feature should have a date, but no release date or dateline.

If you find you don't have time to write a feature story, you may want to tell a reporter about the subject and let him or her do the feature article or television interview at their convenience. This method is used more and more, because of time and personnel limitations.



One National Forest officer says, "There are a couple of big potential dividends here besides time-saving for me. First, we are practically guaranteed a better placement and more complete (longer) story because the paper or television station has a time investment, pride of authorship, and confidence in the product. Beyond this, there is plenty of time during the field trip to discuss Forest Service policy, answer the reporter's questions on a multitude of subjects, and develop rapport.

It is an excellent process for both the reporter and Forest Service host. It is a good time to get Forest Service managers and reporters together. Finally, the news people love the chance to get out in the woods and away from the daily routine."

After The Fact...

Journalists usually don't show you their "copy" for review before publication. For you to suggest this could be interpreted as censorship—something the news media tolerates only in time of war. In the rare case that a story involves highly sensitive issues or key technical information, you may ask for the privilege of reading the story in advance. If you receive this privilege, use it sparingly and tactfully. With a technical story, confine your suggested changes to technical facts; let the editor take care of language, style, and point of view.

The facts you provide may be interpreted differently by the reporter. Although you may disagree with the direction a story is taking, you must remember that we all see the same things differently at times. Offer advice, but recognize where points of view differ.

Pictorial News

This can include photos, publications, forest maps or parts of them, and drawings or other illustrative matter. These are valuable tools in the job of informing the public.



Learn to take effective photos that tell a story. Pictures can be used to illustrate Forest Service activities or programs. Sometimes a good picture may be just the thing needed to "sell" the editor your story. In some instances, photographs or other art are very important—especially for magazine articles, newspaper Sunday supplements, television interviews, and books.

Forest Service photos are available free for publication. It is desirable that a credit line, such as "Photo by USDA Forest Service," appear under the published photo. We usually don't request return of a print; if it is not returned, order a replacement.

There may be circumstances, of course, where you only want to "loan" a photograph, with the understanding that every effort will be made to return it to you.

Forest maps or any part of them may be reproduced by newspapers or any other publication, but they should run a credit line, "Map by USDA Forest Service." Forest Service produced maps, booklets, etc., are public material and not subject to copyright laws, unless they contain privately copywritten texts, photos or artwork.

Other Illustrations

Many newspapers now use computers and "offset" printing processes that may require special consideration. Find out about your local situation. Most magazines and newspapers prefer 8"x10" glossy prints and color transparencies or slides. Television stations can use horizontal slides only. (Vertical slides are cut off on top and bottom or sides will have black borders.) Matte finish black and white photos, videotape and other aids may also be used in presenting a story at some stations.

Managing Information Flow

News stories carry an invisible tag: "Perishable—Rush!" With a daily newspaper, one day's delay may be the difference between running a story in full on page one, or as a paragraph near the want ads.

Your Priorities

The importance and interest of a story will determine your new release distribution. It may be good for local newspapers only, or for regional newspapers by direct mailing or through a local correspondent. A regular supply of stories on a variety of subjects will lessen the lingering impression that the Forest Service exists mainly to fight fires and sell timber!

Timing The Release

Plan your releases in advance whenever possible. For releases to weekly editors, plan at least a week ahead. Get your stories to them early in the week. Most go to press on Tuesday or Wednesday, and "hit the street" Wednesday or Thursday.

If you have weekly and daily papers in your area and radio and TV stations with daily news broadcasts, it's best to time your news releases for nearly simultaneous use by all of them. Most newspaper editors do not mind being "scooped" a day to two by the broadcast media; some, in fact, think it only whets the appetite of readers to learn more about the story. There is seldom the need to provide a release date. It is sometimes used to coincide with the time a speech is being made or award being given. Deadlines are different, however, and the official in the field may have to make a special effort to set up an equitable release system for both newspaper and broadcast journalists.

Metropolitan dailies and other media usually ignore a release date, if they do not see necessity for it. The Regional Office puts

"**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**" on its releases, relying on mailing time to give all media the best break possible.

Note:

Forest Supervisors should send five copies of all locally produced releases to the Regional Forester, marked "Information Office."

Developing Local Information

Chance uncovers some story opportunities. Perhaps you or another employee will see something newsworthy as you drive through the Forest, or Forest users may visit you and mention something that impressed them. Carry a notebook to jot these things down.

Another story opportunity comes when a news release sent out by the RO Information Office fails to appear in a local paper. The story may need a local tie-in. In such a case, you may wish to take your copy of the release, rewrite it to apply specifically to your District or Forest, and submit it to the editor that did not use the RO release. Of course, sometimes a reporter will save you the trouble by calling for the "local angle," but generally, you may need to follow up yourself, to maintain a regular information flow.

Hints:

A "calendar" of news topics is helpful. Think over the resources in your area, your management programs, your activities and your people. List those that need public attention. Now organize the list in relation to the time (or times) of the year most appropriate for a story about each subject—for example, a watershed management article in spring; a fire prevention story in May or June; or perhaps a campground cleanup item in July. Set up a "promise card" for each date you establish.



The Editor, Friend or Foe?

It's a great feeling to read or hear an editorial, lauding the Forest Service, or to see a news or feature story accurately written. It's bitter medicine when a news story misrepresents us, or an editorial wallops us. But before you fly off the handle, ask yourself if there is any justification for their point of view. In many cases there is, though we may not totally agree with their conclusions.

Warning:

Don't hit the ceiling if a "friendly" editor takes an editorial poke at you sometime. It happens occasionally. If an unfavorable editorial shows the editor had insufficient information or inaccurate information, give them the information they need for proper understanding.

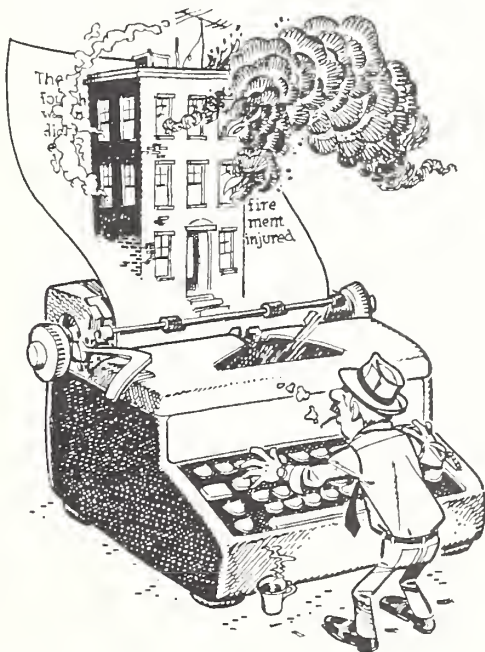
Never tell editors how to write their editorials. A fair editor, however, probably won't mind a suggestion to consider a certain topic for an editorial. They get suggestions from many people, and appreciate background material. Just don't overload them!

On very controversial issues, it may be advisable to meet with the editor or editorial board at major papers. This will give them a chance to get their information first hand.

RO News Releases

These are written or edited in the Information Office and mailed to newspapers, magazines, and radio and TV news directors.

The Regional Office mails to all news media in the Region that want to receive news releases. Sometimes mailings are also made to areas adjoining Oregon and Washington, or to media in other states. A Regional Office news release will go directly to each Forest's news media. The Regional Office, however, can mail by Zone of Responsibility, thereby pinpointing targets whenever necessary.



When possible, RO releases are sent on DG (FLIPS) to Forest Information persons the day of mailing to news media, so that the Forest will not be caught off guard by calls from news media seeking a local angle on the release. If an RO release will have an obvious effect on a certain Forest or area, the release will be coordinated with the affected Supervisor(s) and their public affairs officers.

RO news release mailing lists are canvassed once a year to keep them up to date. *Secretary of Agriculture regulations require that news media annually signify their desire to receive releases in order to be placed on or kept on the list.*



Broadcast Media

Radio and television differ from the print media in several ways. TV is more graphic and has slightly more impact. Radio is more immediate. A TV or radio interview, either live or taped, is an opportunity to "tell our story." Note that radio—while a less "visible" medium—has widespread use, and offers an opportunity to "tell the story in our own words." Radio news broadcasts repeated throughout the day also offer a chance for more members of the public to hear the story. Often, a television broadcaster will "tell" the story for us, editing it to fit visual information and tight time requirements. Radio requires succinct, to-the-point statements as well, but does offer us a better opportunity to get our message across "in our own words."



You will be able to communicate more effectively if you consider some of the following suggestions excerpted from *Executive Interviews, Do You Or Don't You?*, Michel Klepper Associated, Inc. (Public Relations).



- Have an objective. It's important to spend time thinking about the story you want viewers or listeners to receive. Decide in advance the important points you want to convey. It is wise to limit yourself to one objective with two or three key points. The audience cannot turn back to page one and reread your opening remarks.
- Preview your interviewer. Try to get a feel for the reporter's style and interests. Will the interview be brief and directed at a single issue or lengthy and wide-ranging? If you intend to use visuals, it is wise to advise the reporter in advance so that the visuals can be integrated into the interview.



- Anticipate questions. Make a list of questions that might be asked. Don't ask the reporter to provide the questions in advance, however. You are the expert and should know the subject. If you end up not knowing the answer to a question, just say, "I don't know."
- Formulate your answers. Decide how you want to respond to each question. Respond to the question directly, then develop a positive statement that incorporates the key point you wish to make.
- Answer the questions. You will come across as the honest and forthright person you are if you respond directly to the interviewer's question. Be careful on questions that call for a "yes" or "no" answer. Answer "yes" or "no, that's not true," then quickly clarify the situation or make your point.
- Keep it simple. Avoid reams of statistics, technical jargon, and buzz words. Use conversational language that is familiar to the viewer.
- Be confident. Your knowledge is your strength. Speaking from strength will make you an effective spokesperson for the Forest Service.

TV News Features and Video

Television stations will cover newsworthy activities on the National Forests particularly if the activity is not too far away, the station is adequately staffed, and there is not too much "big" news breaking at the same time.



TV stations will generally want to provide their own pictures or video for feature stories. This is especially true for stations in major viewing markets. Utilizing video produced by our field personnel will depend upon a number of factors, including the size of the media coverage area. Smaller stations may use some edited into a short feature to be included in regular news programs. Usually TV stations will want to use their own video.



Making good use of video equipment implies developing not only skill in operations but also in acquiring basic production skills. Unless care is taken in developing the objectives, the end product may not look like the desired results. Most of our agency people don't have the time or skills for broadcast quality video productions. Our video equipment is primarily for internal use.

Video has limited application with the broadcast media. Forest-owned video equipment is not capable of producing broadcast quality material. There are, however, instances where $\frac{3}{4}$ " video is useful with the media. Taping a sequence, and bringing it into a local TV station for previewing by an assignment editor may generate enough interest for them to develop a feature story. Small market areas with their own cable system may utilize Forest-produced material, if the quality is good.

The key to optimum use of this medium is developing the basic production skills of planning, scripting, use of lighting, audio camera techniques and editing.

News Clippings: A Working Tool

Clippings help you and the agency to evaluate public reaction to Forest Service policies and activities, and to determine the number of our releases actually used by local newspapers.

After examining local newspapers for use of release materials and reactions, clip all items that are important to the Forest Supervisor's Office, the Regional Office, or the Washington Office.

Complete and apply sticker (Form 1600-2) to the clippings. *By mailing them the day you clip them*, the chore is less burdensome, and the RO receives the information while it is current. Do not mount the clips on paper.

USDA—FOREST SERVICE

NEWSPAPER CLIPPING SLIP

Name of paper

Where published

Date of issue

Sent by

Stationed at

Forest Officers:

You are requested to clip any important newspaper article concerning forestry or the work of the Forest Service. Attach this gummed slip to the article and after filling in the blanks, forward it to the Regional Forester in accordance with Regional instructions.

FS 1600-2 (11/50)

☆GPO : 1980 O - 323-924

If you need your own record of the clipping, photocopy the clipping and send the original. The Regional Office can use original clippings only, and will send originals of important clippings to the Chief after making copies.

See R-6 Supplement, FSM 1651.12, July 1977, for more information.

In case of panic...

Have specific types of problems you'd like to know how to handle? Contact a Forest public information officer or the Regional Information Office for "leads" and more precise help. The more practice you get working with media, the more comfortable you'll be—but a little professional advice can help you get started. It's available—and you don't have to "do it alone!"

The following "do it yourself" list of contacts and resources should also be helpful. Your list should cover your unit's Zone of Influence. If a news item is of interest outside that zone, you may also wish to send it to news media there. Coordinate with other Forests if you intend to overlap their zones with a release that involves them. See FSM 1602, R-6 Supplement.

Resource Form

Who (name)	What (job)	When (deadline)	Where (address)	How (phone)
	Newspaper Editors			
	Other Writers			
	Radio and TV News Contacts			
	Agency Resources			
	Staff			
	Public Affairs Officer			
	Other Help			

Forest Service NEWS



Pacific Northwest Region
USDA • Forest Service

News Contacts:
Wally Shiverdecker
Evelyn Brown
(503) 221-2971

Pacific Northwest Region
Information Office
319 S.W. Pine Street
P.O. Box 3623
Portland, OR 97208

U-20
9-14-84

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SAMPLE

NATIONAL FOREST FIRE ACREAGE LOW - SO FAR - IN 1984

Statistics for the 1984 fire season in the National Forests of Oregon and Washington indicate total fires and acres burned to be well below average, according to Buck Pino, Fire Coordinator for the Pacific Northwest Region of the USDA Forest Service.

The 1984 figures, through September 11, total 1,189 fires of all kinds burning 2,271 acres. This compares with the 10-year average of 1,564 fires burning 7,513 acres. The record high year was 1970 when 3,385 fires burned 160,911 acres. The low year, during the past 20, was 1982 with 1,208 fires burning 2,144 acres.

The 1984 statistics are not for a full year and potential for wildfire will continue to be a problem through October. "During the fall season, risk from campers, hunters, and slash burning must still be anticipated," Pino said. "Since destruction by human-caused fires far exceeds lightning, Smokey Bear must stay on the job."

Other regions of the west did not fare as well this season, according to Pino. "This region, besides fighting its own fires, supported other regions with firefighters," he added. "This year, we sent 52 crews of 20 persons each to Montana, seven crews to Nevada, and 13 crews to California."

"The sharing of fire crews and other resources at all levels of government is a key element in professional and cost-effective fire suppression," Pino explained.

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Persons of any race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, or with any handicapping condition are welcome to use and enjoy all facilities, programs, and services of the USDA. Discrimination in any form is strictly against agency policy, and should be reported to the Secretary of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250.

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